

The relationship of Shiism to Islam is very similar to the relationship of Christianity to Jesus' true message. Like Christianity, Shiism lures and deceives its followers by operating under the name of Islam and incorporating some Islamic doctrines while adding new doctrines that have no basis & contradict with Islam as taught by the Quran and preached by Prophet Mohammad.

We have to be more cautious regarding classifying or labelling individual Shiites. Because Shiism encourages **Taqiya (concealing and lying about one's true beliefs)**, it is hard to know what a specific Shiite individual truly believes in. We will leave it to Allah to judge the true beliefs of individual Shiites. The more a Shiite individual follows Shiism, the more likely he/she will be straying from Islam.

Who are the Shia & what is Shiism?

Shia (Shi'a) is a plural word that refers to the people who follow Shiism. Shii (or Shiite) is singular word that refers to an individual who follows Shiism. Shiism (or Shiaism) is the name of the religious beliefs or ideology of the Shia.

The Shia are those who elevate the status of Imam Ali (& his descendant Imams), who was prophet Mohammad's cousin and son in law. The way the Shia elevate the status of Imam Ali is very similar to the way Christians elevate the status of prophet Jesus and worship him. Sunni Muslims highly respect Imam Ali as a Caliph, cousin, companion, & son-in-law of prophet Mohammad. Unlike the Shia, Sunni Muslims tend to be good hearted and don't hate the Shia, but regard them as misguided.

All Shia sects together represent 10% -12% of people who claim to be Muslims. The Shia consist of several distinctive sects. They are very insistent on distinguishing themselves as followers a specific sect.

There are many Shia sects. The following are the main Shia sects:

(a) The **Twelvers** (called ***Ithnaa Ashariyya*** and sometimes called ***Imamis*** or ***Jafaris***) are those Shia who believe in twelve divinely-appointed Imams. This is the **largest Shia sect today**

and its adherents represent 90% of the population of Iran, about 55% of the population of Iraq, 55% of the population of Azerbaijan, 27% of the population of Lebanon, with significant presence in Kuwait, Bahrain, Pakistan, and Yemen.

(b) **Ismailis** are those Shia whose line of Imams is continuous. The Agha Khan, a billionaire living in Europe, is their current Imam. They believe that the Quran has a esoteric/hidden meaning that is different from its apparent meaning and only their Imams know this esoteric/hidden meaning, not even prophet Mohammad knew this esoteric/hidden meaning. Today, the largest concentration of Ismailis is in India and Pakistan.

(c) **Arab Alawis** are a sect founded by Ibn Nusair, that is why Alawis are also called Nusairis. They primarily live in Syria, and to a lesser extent, in Northern Lebanon and Southern Turkey. Even though Alawis constitute not more than 15% of Syria's population, the President of Syria, Bashar Assad, comes from a Alawi family and he maintains his power by relying on the Alawis who hold top leadership positions in the Syrian army and domestic intelligence service. Little is known about the true beliefs of the Alawis because they are secretive. Twelver Shia don't consider Alawis as Shia.

(d) **Turkish Alewis** are a sect that combines Shiism with Sufism. They are very different from the Arab Alawis in terms of their beliefs, even though their name is almost the same. They constitute about 15% of Turkey's population.

FURTHER FACTIONS AMONG THE SHIAH

Zaidi ("Fiver")

Zaidiyya, Zaidism or **Zaydi** is the second largest branch of Shia Islam. It is a Shia school named after Zayd ibn Ali. Followers of the Zaidi fiqh are called Zaidis (or occasionally **Fivers**). However, there is also a group called *Zaidi Wasītis* who are Twelvers (see below). Zaidis constitute roughly 42–47% of the population of Yemen.

Doctrine

The Zaydis, Twelvers, and Ismailis all recognize the same first four Imams; however, the Zaidis recognize Zayd ibn Ali as the fifth. After the time of Zayd ibn Ali, the Zaidis recognized that any descendant of Hasan ibn Ali or Hussein ibn Ali could be imam after fulfilling certain conditions. Other well-known Zaidi Imams in history were Yahya ibn Zayd, Muhammad al-Nafs al-

Zakiyya and Ibrahim ibn Abdullah. In matters of Islamic jurisprudence, the Zaydis follow Zayd ibn Ali's teachings which are documented in his book *Majmu' l Fiqh* (in Arabic: مجموع الفقه). Al-Hadi ila'l-Haqq Yahya, founder of the Zaydi state in Yemen, instituted elements of the jurisprudential tradition of the Sunni Muslim jurist Abū Hanīfa, and as a result, Zaydi jurisprudence today continues somewhat parallel to that of the Hanafis.

The Zaidi doctrine of Imamah does not presuppose the infallibility of the imam nor that the Imams receive divine guidance. Zaidis also do not believe that the Imamate must pass from father to son but believe it can be held by any Sayyid descended from either Hasan ibn Ali or Hussein ibn Ali (as was the case after the death of Hasan ibn Ali). Historically, Zaidis held that Zayd was the rightful successor of the 4th imam since he led a rebellion against the Umayyads in protest of their tyranny and corruption. Muhammad al-Baqir did not engage in political action, and the followers of Zayd believed that a true imam must fight against corrupt rulers.

The founding Zaidism of Yemen was of the Jarudiyya group; however, with increasing interaction with Hanafi and Shafi'i rites of Sunni Islam, there was a shift from the Jarudiyya group to the Sulaimaniyya, Tabiriyya, Butriyya or Salihyya groups. Zaidis form the second dominant religious group in Yemen. Currently, they constitute about 40–45% of the population in Yemen. Ja'faris and Isma'ilis are 2–5%. In Saudi Arabia, it is estimated that there are over 1 million Zaydis (primarily in the western provinces).

Currently the most prominent Zaydi movement is Houthis movement, known by the name of *Shabab Al Mu'mineen* (Believing Youth). They have been the subject of an ongoing campaign against them by the Yemeni Government in which the army has lost 743 men, and thousands of innocent civilians have been killed or displaced by government forces causing a grave humanitarian crisis in north Yemen.

Ismaili ("Sevener")

Ismailis gain their name from their acceptance of Isma'il ibn Jafar as the divinely appointed spiritual successor (Imam) to Ja'far al-Sadiq, wherein they differ from the Twelvers, who accept Musa al-Kadhim, younger brother of Isma'il, as the true Imam.

Though there are several sub-groupings within the Ismailis, the term in today's vernacular generally refers to The Shia Imami Ismaili Muslim (Nizari community), generally known as the Ismailis, who are followers of the Aga Khan and the largest group among the Ismailiyyah. Another community which falls under the Isma'il's are the Dawoodi Bohras, lead by a Da'i al-Mutlaq as representative of a hidden imam.

Ismaili Imams

After the death of Isma'il ibn Jafar, many Ismailis believed that one day the messianic Mahdi, whom they believed to be Muhammad ibn Ismail, would return and establish an age of justice. One group included the violent Qarmatians, who had a stronghold in Bahrain. In contrast, some Ismailis believed the Imamate *did* continue, and that the Imams were in occultation and still communicated and taught their followers through a network of dawah "Missionaries".

In 909, Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi Billah, a claimant to the Ismaili Imamate, established the Fatimid Caliphate. During this period, three lineages of imams formed. The first branch, known today as the Druze, began with Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah. Born in 386 AH (985), he ascended as ruler at the age of eleven. The typical religiously tolerant Fatimid Empire saw much persecution under his reign. When in 411 AH (1021) his mule returned without him, soaked in blood, a religious group that was forming in his lifetime broke off from mainstream Ismailism and did not acknowledge his successor. Later to be known as the Druze, they believe al-Hakim to be the incarnation of God and the prophesied Mahdi who would one day return and bring justice to the world. The faith further split from Ismailism as it developed very unusual doctrines which often class it separately from both Ismailiyyah and Islam.

The second split occurred following the death of Ma'ad al-Mustansir Billah in 487 AH (1094). His rule was the longest of any caliph in any Islamic empire. Upon his passing away, his sons, Nizar the older, and Al-Musta'li, the younger, fought for political and spiritual control of the dynasty. Nizar was defeated and jailed, but according to Nizari tradition, his son escaped to Alamut, where the Iranian Ismaili had accepted his claim. From here on, the Nizari Ismaili community has continued with a present, living Imam.